

CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE

HUMAN NATURE

STORAGE-ITEM  
MAIN

LP9-L23G

U.B.C. LIBRARY

BF  
131  
S695  
1927

G. ELLIOT SMITH

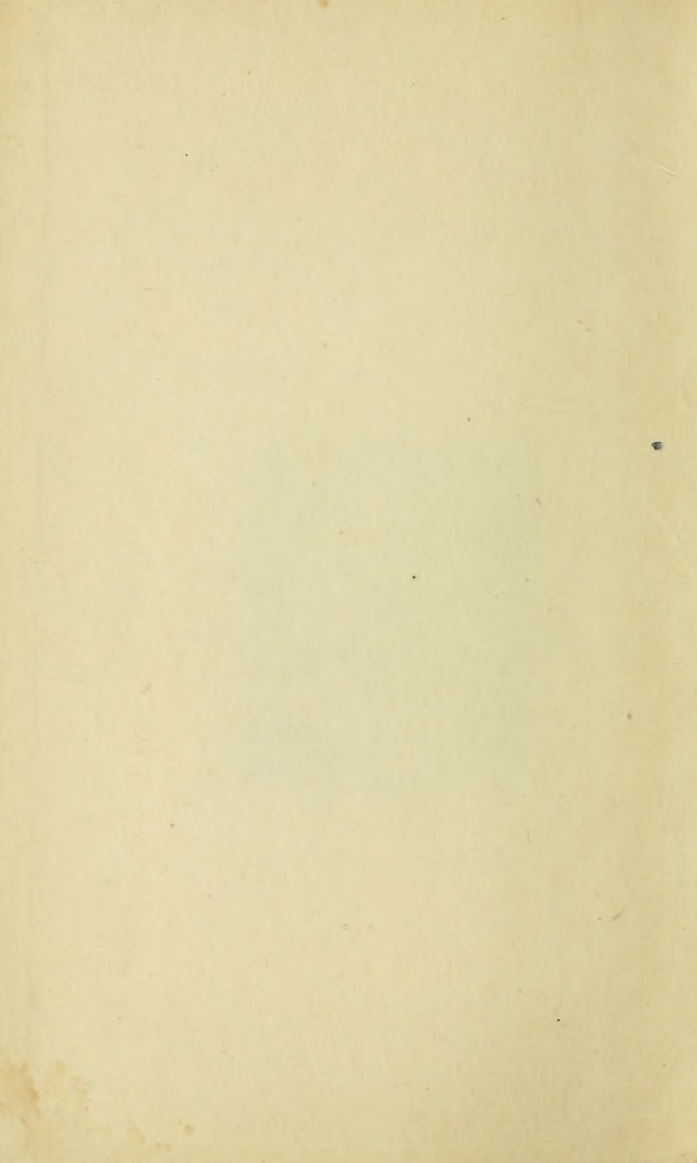
THE LIBRARY



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

AB385

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from  
University of British Columbia Library



# HUMAN NATURE

## *UNIFORM WITH THIS LECTURE*

Each cloth, 2s. net, by post 2s. 2d.; paper cover, 1s. net,  
by post 1s. 1d.

1910. **THE TASK OF RATIONALISM.** By JOHN RUSSELL, M.A.  
(Out of print.)
1911. **PEACE AND WAR IN THE BALANCE.** By HENRY W.  
NEVINSON. (In cloth or paper cover.)
1912. **ART AND THE COMMONWEAL.** By WILLIAM ARCHER. (In  
paper cover only.)
1913. **WAR AND THE ESSENTIAL REALITIES.** By NORMAN  
ANGELL. (Out of print.)
1914. **THE LIFE PILGRIMAGE OF MONCURE DANIEL CON-  
WAY.** By the Rt. Hon. J. M. ROBERTSON. (In paper cover only.)
1915. **THE STOIC PHILOSOPHY.** By PROF. GILBERT MURRAY.  
(In cloth or paper cover.)
1916. **GIBBON AND CHRISTIANITY.** By EDWARD CLODD. (In  
cloth or paper cover.)
1917. **THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONALITIES.** By ISRAEL  
ZANGWILL. (Out of print.)
1918. **ON THE URGENT NEED FOR REFORM IN OUR  
NATIONAL AND CLASS EDUCATION.** By Sir HARRY H.  
JOHNSTON. (In cloth only.)
1919. **RATIONALISM AND RELIGIOUS REACTION.** By JANE E.  
HARRISON. (Out of print.)
1920. **MYSTICISM AND THE WAY OUT.** By IVOR LL. TUCKETT,  
M.A., M.D. (Cantab). (In cloth or paper cover.)
1921. **THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF ETHNOLOGY.** By PROF.  
A. C. HADDON, M.A., F.R.S. (In paper cover only.)
1922. **FREETHOUGHT AND OFFICIAL PROPAGANDA.** By the  
HON. BERTRAND RUSSELL, M.A., F.R.S. (In cloth or paper cover.)
1923. **THE POET AND COMMUNICATION.** By JOHN DRINK-  
WATER. (Out of print.)
1924. **WILLIAM JOHNSON FOX (1786-1864).** By GRAHAM WALLAS,  
M.A., D.LITT. (In cloth or paper cover.)
1925. **THE RELIGION OF A DARWINIST.** By SIR ARTHUR  
KEITH. (In cloth or paper cover.)
1926. **PROGRESS AND THE UNFIT.** By LEONARD HUXLEY,  
LL.D. (In cloth or paper cover.)

CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE

# HUMAN NATURE

DELIVERED AT SOUTH PLACE INSTITUTE ON  
MARCH 17, 1927

BY

G. ELLIOT SMITH, F.R.S.

( *Leonard Huxley, LL.D., in the Chair* )

LONDON :  
WATTS & CO.,  
JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.4

First published March, 1927

Printed in Great Britain  
by Watts & Co., Johnson's Court,  
Fleet Street, London, E.C.4



## CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

---

“THE proper study of mankind is man.” So said the poet two centuries ago. His epigram has become a proverb ; and it seems as though our lecturer to-night has taken this proverb as the motto of his own life-work. But the modern application of the old saying embraces fields of inquiry undreamt of by the poet. He thought of the more literary aspect of knowledge : what students of government had said in their Republics, their Laws, their Utopias, their Leviathans, about man’s unruly desires and the best ways of harnessing them to the wheels of well-being and good governance. He thought of what had been written of man’s character and civic life aforetime ; he called to mind the waves of human impulse or divine judgment displayed in the rise and fall of empires as recounted in history, sacred or profane ; he mustered the great examples of personal character in action that Plutarch set

forth in brilliant comparisons ; he reviewed the authentic witness of Thucydides or Macchiavelli in their vivid analysis of political faction and unscrupulous statecraft as they had seen it and shared in it.

Such a student of mankind would find suggestive analyses of character in the volumes of essays, plays, satires ready to hand, though as a satirist himself Pope had a bitter facility in dissecting living victims out of the book of life.

But, however brilliant the student, his studies were limited in range. The sphere in which he worked was only one aspect of Man. Modern science, modern research, have opened a vaster field. As in geology the fossils have created a new history of life, so in archæology the buried cities freed from the debris of ruined civilizations, the primitive ideas unravelled from the wrappings of later thought, lead to conceptions of human nature and human development very different from the limited conceptions that ruled the correctitude of the early Eighteenth Century. The newer studies of comparative mythology, compara-

---

tive religion, comparative history of civilization, have riddled the tribal vainglory that saw a unique revelation, a unique world-dispensation in its local chronicles. Before comparative anatomy became a science, Lord Monboddo's superficial guesses, half a century after Pope's day, concerning the link between men and apes, simply afforded sport for the robust fundamentalism of Dr. Johnson. To-day the boot is on the other foot. Shem, Ham, and Japhet are no longer the eponymous ancestors of the so limited races of men. Not the ribs of Noah's ark, but human skulls and bones actually measured and compared, are used to determine the affinities of the children of men. They give a key, also, to the essential differences that mark off Modern Man and all his line of forebears from the rival species, big enough of skull, but gross-jawed and strangely different in teeth, that intrudes upon the geologic record for a period, and thereafter, we know not how, is blotted out.

In this province our lecturer has explored far and wide—one of the pioneering band who have used their great knowledge and skill to

reconstruct from the fragmentary relics of the past the earliest form that may be dignified with the name of Man, and so mark this off from the half-men of incomplete human structure. He is associated with the researches that give Man for evolutionary field a whole geological age in which to develop his characteristic nature. His hand has helped to give Man his true place in the frame of Nature and the sequence of life, that stretches from unreflective existence to the creative centre of thought. Of anthropology in this wide sense it may be said, as it was said of physiology long ago, that, like the waters of the Atlantic washing the shores of the Old World and the New, it touches alike the witness of the body and the witness of the mind.

Man's bodily structure and the things created by man both offer evidence as to his underlying character. Human nature, that is:—on the one hand, the sum of his past growth, a stream of ancestral tendencies, difficult to divert from its old and vehement course; on the other, the potential of expanding desires and aspirations, the very force

---

which may impress a new direction upon that living stream. One half of human nature is deeply conservative. It distils from the common experience of man's age-long struggle the original virtue and the original sin with which each generation in turn sets out. It hands down instincts sprung from the conditions of primitive existence, yet often running counter to the needs of modern conditions. The essence of that experience is so paradoxically constant in its blend of contraries that optimist and pessimist alike cry: "Human nature is the same all the world over."

Progress lies with the other half of human nature—the half that seizes on the potential means of progress and utilizes them. Looking over the anthropological field, the student may be able to answer our importunate questionings. Is it a fact that everywhere, at any given point in the evolution of man, human nature strikes a fairly similar balance between innate good and innate evil, yet does the process of civilization still testify to man's conscious selection and fostering of certain qualities of thought and feeling, with conse-

quent refinement and elevation of that nature in general?

It is with large expectation of light to be thrown upon the problems of man and his nature that we turn to our distinguished lecturer to-night.

L. H.

## HUMAN NATURE

---

IN spite of the advancement of learning during the last two centuries, the claim that "the most useful and least advanced of all human knowledge seems to be that of man himself" is as true to-day as it was when Rousseau made it in 1754. For, if much significant information concerning man's origin and evolution and the physiological and psychological factors that determine human behaviour has been accumulated, I doubt whether modern scholars, taken as a group, have so clear a vision of the essential truths as the great humanists of the Eighteenth Century had. However we may dissent from some of the more extreme pretensions of Mandeville, Rousseau, and their followers, impartial study of the evidence accumulated by modern ethnologists affords ample corroboration of the views they adopted from the English philosophers Locke and Lord Shaftesbury, and definitely establishes

the two fundamental principles: the innate goodness of man and the significant part played by the introduction of agriculture (by creating property in land and moral and social inequality) in bringing to an end the Golden Age of peace and contentment. It is a strange paradox that the humanitarians of the eighteenth century, profiting by the psychology of Locke and the humanitarian views of Lord Shaftesbury, should with such scanty evidence have appreciated its real meaning when so many of their successors of the Twentieth Century fail to realize the plain significance of an overwhelming mass of unimpeachable testimony. Hence there seems to be a need for a renewed study of human nature, and in particular for emphasizing the clear significance of the admitted facts.

For even many of those who actually call attention to the evidence seem to lose sight of its meaning. For instance, in his treatise on *Morals in Evolution* (1906; pt. i, pp. 42-8), Professor L. T. Hobhouse repeatedly expresses surprise that the character, attainments, and social life of people like the Veddahs of



---

Ceylon (and also of the Yahgans of Tierra del Fuego) should be "*in many respects not what one would have expected of one of the most primitive races of men* [the italics are mine], almost without social organization, but with a strongly-developed family life, far from deficient in the moral qualities upon which higher forms of social life are built up, but wanting in the power or the stimulus, or both [it would have been more in accordance with the evidence to say the desire], to unite in larger numbers, and in the more complex and far-reaching purposes upon which regular societies are founded" (p. 45).

It seems to have come as a shock to Professor Hobhouse to discover that the really primitive family groups he chanced to select (as the starting point for his story of ethical evolution) should reveal a higher type of morality and social probity than perhaps any society that came afterwards, which was rather a disconcerting way of starting to explain the moral uplift. Perhaps I can best allow him to explain in his own words the difficulty that met him in embarking on his study of moral

development. Basing his narrative on the statements of the brothers Sarasin, he writes : "The Veddahs consist of a mere handful of scattered families, living sometimes in trees, in the rainy season often in caves, though they are capable of making primitive huts. They are hunters, and each Veddah, with his wife and family, keeps his hunting-ground for the most part scrupulously to himself. These very primitive folk, we read with some surprise, are strictly monogamous, and have the saying that nothing but death parts husband and wife. Infidelity among them is in fact rare, and is generally avenged upon the paramour by assassination at the hands of the husband. The looseness of morals which prevails apart from marriage among most savages also appears to be rare among these people ; and, though the husband is master in his own cave, his wife is well treated, and is in no sense a slave. The Veddahs are credited with affection for their children, and with attachment to their parents after they have grown up." Professor Hobhouse's cautious phraseology suggests a mild incredulity as to these

---

unexpected phenomena, and lacks the robust and emphatic appreciation that most writers reveal when describing the happiness and contentment of the well-knit family life and high morality of peoples untouched by civilization. The obvious reluctance to admit these facts is the most impressive testimony to their unexpectedness. The absence of slavery, class distinctions, social organization, warfare, burial customs and religion, and the lack of personal property, were the chief factors that eliminated trouble and made for peace and happiness. Really primitive people are "truthful, unaggressive, hospitable and sympathetic to strangers in need, grateful, and plucky in fighting." The absence of warfare among them is not due to any lack of courage or deficiency of the instinct of pugnacity, which they display when circumstances force them to fight. It means that man is essentially peaceful and good-natured when free from artificial incentives to strife.

In his illuminating history of *The Idea of Progress*, published in 1920, Professor J. B. Bury has given a brilliant picture of the intel-

lectual movement of the middle of the Eighteenth Century that brought about so profound an influence on society and politics, and eventually led to the excesses of the French Revolution and all that followed in its wake. He has brought out with great clearness the fact that the movement was essentially humanistic, in that it put man in the centre of the picture. At that time belief in the malleability of human nature by social institutions took definite shape, and the view developed that intellectual and moral inequalities between man and man arise entirely from differences in education and social circumstances. This ignores all question of heredity and innate differences, and comes into sharp conflict with the views expressed in Dr. Leonard Huxley's Conway Lecture last year. But we now know enough to be sure that both nature and nurture play a part in moulding personality. However much importance one may attach to inborn aptitudes and abilities, I think there is much to be said for the view endorsed by Professor Bury that "the social inheritance of ideas and emotions to which the individual is submitted

---

from infancy is more important than the tendencies physically transmitted from parent to child. The power of education and government in moulding the members of a society has recently been illustrated on a large scale in the psychological transformation of the German people in the life of a generation." In an address on Primitive Man delivered to the British Academy ten years ago I expressed the same idea in a cruder way. Confirmation of this inference will, I think, emerge plainly enough from the facts I propose to lay before you ; but I emphasize it at the outset, lest you imagine I am going to commit myself to the pessimistic doctrine of assuming progress to be attainable only by breeding and not by education.

Once it is recognized that by the use of their own reason men can shape their destinies, there is hope for bringing about the improvement of social conditions and moulding society for the greater happiness of the people. The great humanitarian movement in the Eighteenth Century was in large measure determined by the interest newly awakened

by the study of the state of society among the primitive peoples of North America. The influence of such anthropological inquiries is graphically depicted by Professor Bury :—

“Interest in the remote peoples of the earth, in the unfamiliar civilizations of the East, in the untutored races of America and Africa, was vivid in France in the eighteenth century. Every one knows how Voltaire and Montesquieu used the Hurons or Persians to hold up the glass to Western manners and morals as Tacitus used the Germans to criticize the society of Rome. But very few ever look into the seven volumes of the Abbe Raynal's *History of the Two Indies*, which appeared in 1772. It is, however, one of the most remarkable books of the century. Its immediate practical importance lay in the array of facts which it furnished to the friends of humanity in the movement against negro slavery.”

The question of the abolition of slavery was the starting-point of Dr. Moncure Conway's interest in the humanitarian questions which it is the object of this Memorial Lecture to discuss. It is for this reason that I have

chosen the subject of human nature and what the great humanists of the Eighteenth Century used to call "natural man" as the theme for this lecture to-day.

Ever since the human family became articulate, and left a record of its thoughts in folklore and writing, there has been a widespread belief transmitted to us from the distant past that at one time man enjoyed a Golden Age of peace and happiness, which the subsequent history of civilization has in great measure destroyed. This is the view to which Hesiod gave expression in his *Works and Days* more than twenty-five centuries ago; and during the succeeding ages the legend of the Golden Age has been a constant theme of argument. In his masterly review of the history of these discussions Professor Bury neglected to refer to the confirmation that modern knowledge of primitive peoples has provided of the essential accuracy of this ancient belief.

Ten years ago my colleague, Mr. W. J. Perry,\* was led by similar reasoning (from

\* See his more recent works, *The Growth of Civilization* and *The Children of the Sun*, for full references.

the study of primitive peoples scattered in various parts of the world) to revive the conviction of the essential truth of this ancient story, and for doing so he has been subjected to a storm of criticism and even ridicule, which during the last couple of years has increased in violence. Only a few days ago an eminent American scholar, who has devoted his life to biological investigation, and in particular to the study of the behaviour of man and animals, expressed the opinion\* that Perry's views were utterly preposterous and opposed to common sense. He said that every one knew perfectly well that "the savage" is really savage and takes a fiendish delight in cruelty and bloodshed, and that it was ridiculous to pretend that his vindictiveness was not innate. If ideas of this sort can still survive among educated men—even those whose business in life it is to study human nature—there is surely some need to emphasize the evidence that is now available for a truly inductive study of the most fundamental of all vital issues for mankind.

\* In the course of conversation with me.



---

None of those who have adopted this attitude of antagonism to Mr. Perry seem to have realized that the whole of his argument consists of reliable reports made by scores of unbiased travellers and anthropologists (whose competence is not in question) upon a very wide range of so-called savage peoples. One might, as Mr. Perry himself has done in a forthcoming book, the manuscript of which he has kindly permitted me to read, quote hundreds of statements relating to uncultured people of different races now living in the most widely contrasted environments, which reveal with remarkable consistency the character and behaviour of people who have never come under the influence of civilization. The matter at issue is of such fundamental importance for the understanding of human nature that, at the risk of tedious repetition, I shall call your attention to some few scraps of the voluminous evidence upon which Mr. Perry relied for building up his case. These reports are in no sense biased, because in the great majority of cases the authors express unbounded amazement (as Professor Hobhouse does in the case of the

Veddahs, to which I have already referred) to find such idyllic conditions of happiness and contentment in such unexpected circumstances. It is important to bear in mind that the mode of life and the environment in most of these cases are such that most people who have been habituated to the ease and comfort of civilized life might think it impossible, under such circumstances, to avoid unhappiness and bad temper.

There still survive in many parts of the world—in Africa, Asia, Australia, America, and even the extreme north of Europe—people who reveal what the disposition of mankind in general must have been in the days before civilization was invented. The most instructive example, perhaps, is afforded by the Punans of Borneo, not only because they are a race of exceptionally good physique and ability, but also because they are living in the same island with peoples akin to them in race, who present a most striking contrast in behaviour, revealing as they do habits more strictly conforming to the usual connotation of the word “savage,” which is so inappro-

priate in the case of the good-natured and cultureless Punans themselves.

The habits of these people have been very graphically depicted by Dr. Charles Hose in his recent book, *Natural Man* (1926).\* The impressiveness of his report is enhanced by the fact that he was collaborating with several well-known anthropologists, some of whom were frankly sceptical of the reality of "the gentle and noble savage." The almost complete lack of culture among a highly competent people like the Punans is a fact of cardinal importance to the student of human nature, because it comes into conflict with the popular fallacy that people tend, almost instinctively, to invent some of the simpler arts without any prompting from others. This phenomenon is all the more significant and impressive from the fact that even the few elements of culture they have, such as the use of the blow-gun, have obviously been borrowed from their neighbours, with whom they have been in contact for centuries—a sure token that the

\* See also Hose and McDougall, *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo* (1911).

other attractions of civilization are not irresistible. Yet a competent, intelligent, and good-natured people, after centuries of acquaintance with, and opportunities for adopting, such elements of culture as agriculture, houses to live in, boats to travel in, property to enjoy, and domestic animals, such as dogs, to share their company, have been content to do without them.

Like most writers upon similar phenomena elsewhere, Dr. Hose is frankly amazed at his own discoveries, just as Professor Hobhouse was when reproducing the report made by the Sarasins. Unlike their neighbours, who are essentially of the same race, the Punans own no property other than the borrowed elements of culture (waist-band and weapons) they carry about with them. They cultivate no crops, relying for all their food on what the jungle can provide. Most surprising of all, for a people who are nomad hunters, they have no domesticated animals, not even dogs, and they do not even make their weapons, but get them from other peoples. Having no cultivated plants, the Punans live exclusively

---

on jungle produce, animal and vegetable. They are surprisingly expert in the use of the blow-pipe for securing animals for food. They share their food with all the members of their group. A hunter returning with game, or any member of the community with commodities obtained by gift or barter, shares it in common with the whole group.

These people are incredibly shy, and seem always to be alert and prepared for an unpleasant emergency. They are like wild animals, timid but friendly, and ready at any moment to fight for life. A Punan will never wantonly slay or attack a man, and never goes on the warpath unless he happens to be caught by some other tribe and compelled to fight. Alone of the native races of Borneo he is not addicted to head-hunting. Nevertheless, if he is attacked he will not only protect himself with vigour, but he will also call other Punans to his assistance.

There are no social grades among the Punan, but in each group one man of experience is a titular chief, without any formally defined authority. There is a strong body of public

opinion of which he is the mouthpiece. Monogamy is the rule, and marriage is for life. Burial and funeral rites are unknown.

The chief accomplishments of the Punans are those of the hunter. In tracking and trapping he displays marvellous skill in the interpretation of signs. From the tracks in the forest he can infer the number of a party he is following, and can cover his own tracks by leaving the firm earth and making his way by the boughs of trees. In this way he can follow a hostile tribe for days without a chance of discovery. He does not attack them without some definite cause, but keeps watch on any one who has injured him, and may wait years to avenge the injury without being seen.

These are truly primitive people—peaceful, happy, good-natured, faithful and kind to their wives, and indulgent and considerate of their children; they have a natural sense of right and justice, are truthful and honest. Having no property, they are free from the temptation of greed and envy. Being on terms of equality with their fellows, causes of

jealousy are rare. But they are quick and able to resent injury or injustice.

Essentially the same facts emerge from the writings of a long series of travellers and ethnologists with reference to uncultured peoples elsewhere in the same area : such as the Negrito peoples of the Philippines (Schadenberg and Vanoverberg) and New Guinea, some of the people in the Aru Islands (Ratzel), the Kubu (Forbes) of Sumatra, the Sakai (Hale and Knocker) and Semang (Skeat and Blagden) of the Malay Peninsula, and the Andaman Islanders (A. R. Brown); the Veddahs of Ceylon, to whom reference has already been made (also the writings of Professor and Mrs. Seligman, and Bailey), some of the jungle tribes of Southern India, the Pygmies of Equatorial Africa and the Bushmen of South Africa (according to Bleek and Lloyd, Stow, Haddon, Keane, Sollas, and many other writers). Many of the aboriginal Australian tribes (Howitt) come into the same category, as did also the now extinct Tasmanians. Among the American Indians the Dene tribe (Hill Tout) of the Mackenzie Basin, the Salish

(de Smet), the Northern Ojibway, the Indians of California, the Paiute of Nevada, Utah, and Arizona (Kroeber), and formerly the Beothuk of Newfoundland. The people of Tierra del Fuego (Hobhouse) in the extreme south, and the Eskimo (Nansen, Boas, Hawkes) in the extreme north, of America, the Ostiaks and Samoyedes (Middendorf, Ratzel, and many others) of Asia, and the Lapps of Europe reveal essentially the same traits.

Taking into consideration the wide range of races represented in this list and the vast differences in their environment, one is justified in assuming that they exhibit the original innate qualities of mankind. Where uninfluenced by alien cultures these people are all peaceful, happy, and well-behaved, kind and generous to their fellows, and faithful monogamists. Such phrases as "extremely courteous and merry"; "in the main they have retained the old virtues of truthfulness, chastity, and courtesy"; "each readily helps all other members of his own community and shares any game he may kill or honey he may take with the rest"; "they are strictly monoga-



---

mous and exhibit great marital fidelity"; "in every respect the women appear to be treated as the equals of the men—they eat the same food; indeed, when we gave presents of food the men seemed usually to give the women and children their share first"; "they are affectionate and indulgent parents," occur with such monotonous regularity in the accounts of these widely scattered peoples that one is compelled to regard such amiable traits as the original attributes of the whole human family. Gentle, affectionate, and peaceful relations one to another, quiet and submissive, obeying the slightest expression of a wish and being very grateful for any assistance or attention, they consider themselves superior to their neighbours, and are unwilling to exchange their wild forest life for any other. They think it perfectly inconceivable that any person should ever take what does not belong to him, strike his fellow, or say anything that is untrue.

In the light of such facts—and they could be multiplied a hundredfold in reference to the primitive peoples already enumerated—and the knowledge that culture was introduced

into most parts of the world in comparatively recent times, how can we refuse to accept Hesiod's story of the former Golden Age of Peace and Happiness as essentially true? Natural Man is revealed to us as a merry and good-natured fellow, honest and considerate, chaste and peaceful, with a rich imagination and a fine sense of pictorial art and craftsmanship. Yet he displays no innate desire to make houses or clothes, to till the soil, or to domesticate animals. He has no social organization apart from the family, and no hereditary chiefs. He has no property, and all the food he collects belongs to the family group. He is monogamous. He is a naked, harmless, truthful, overgrown child, kind-hearted, but quick and able to defend himself and to stop quarrelling among his fellows.

What, then, it will be asked, has happened in civilized communities to introduce strife and discontent, dishonesty and greed, envy, malice, and all uncharitableness? An extensive and critical analysis of the conditions of people of various races and circumstances scattered in various parts of the world has enabled Mr.

---

Perry to put his finger on the main reasons for the downfall of the Golden Age. In north-western Australia, on the western coast of Borneo, on the coast of the Andaman Islands, and among the Eskimo at the Behring Straits, the raids of warlike peoples in the past have so exasperated these otherwise primitive communities that they themselves have adopted warlike habits, and, as a result, their characters have undergone definite demoralization. The aboriginal Australian, as a general rule, was peaceful and good-natured before he was subjected to interference from foreigners. The most conspicuous example is afforded by the natives of the north-west of Australia, who are distinguished by their warlike habits and malicious suspicion. This is almost certainly the result of centuries of interference by piratical Malays from Timor and the neighbouring islands. Among some Australian communities the dual organization of society (adopted from a higher form of culture) has introduced a complex set of marriage rules and ideas relating to the causation of death and the need for vengeance. Trouble arising from

breaking the marriage rules provokes either actual fighting or ritual conflict, such as the ordeal of spear throwing, and in their train reasons for cruelty and bloodshed.

But in widespread areas of Asia, Indonesia, Oceania, and America the practice of head-hunting represents the beginning of organized warfare, which, except when the feelings of revenge for injuries happen to become involved, is a ritual procedure free from anger or animosity or any emotion of pugnacity. Tradition compels these people to procure a head for the funeral of a ruler, for ceremonies connected with agriculture, and for other ritual purposes. But the securing of heads provokes reprisals, and the call for revenge affords a new motive for fighting and other forms of violence. In some cases, also, the element of pride enters into such actions—head-hunting becomes a sport in which young men indulge simply to obtain kudos and the admiration of their womankind. This is seen particularly in the so-called Sea Dyaks, the Ibans of Borneo, in whom such brutality started as the result of

---

their experience of Arab and Malay pirates, and has been perpetuated and extended by the desire for female adulation. Once such cruelty enters into a people's behaviour all the admirable qualities of natural man rapidly suffer from demoralization.

Analysing the conditions under which these most primitive types of warfare enter into early society, like the serpent into the Garden of Eden, it becomes abundantly clear that the introduction of a class system and chieftainship was mainly responsible for the trouble. We must now turn to consider why this happens.

I need not say more here about the consideration I was careful to emphasize in my opening remarks. Cruelty and quarrelsomeness are not due to innate qualities, but are awakened in alert and quick-witted people, who were by nature not malicious, by artificial beliefs and violent practices devised by their fellows.

There are reasons for believing that men were, on the whole, peaceful and happy until the device of agriculture was invented, and the phase of culture which Mr. Perry calls

“food production” (in contradistinction to the Golden Age of “food gathering”) began. For the custom of tilling the soil brought many things in its train, good and bad. It created the assurance of a food supply and a really settled mode of life, and the need (and the opportunity for satisfying it) for many arts and crafts—houses to store grain, pots for holding and cooking grain, works of irrigation for cultivating barley, and eventually the emergence of a leader to organize the community’s labour and the equable distribution of water for irrigation. Weaving, the use of clothing, amulets, jewelry, the arts of the carpenter, the stonemason, the boat-builder, to mention only a few, created a division of labour, and contributed to the emergence of classes, which still further emphasized the position of the irrigation-engineer, who became the first of a dynasty of hereditary kings, the regulators of irrigation and the astronomers, who controlled their people’s destiny. For the celestial phenomena they interpreted and, so to speak, made their own were regarded not merely as the measurers of time and the

---

controllers of the waters of irrigation, but also as the forces that controlled the lives of, and the processes of life-giving in, men themselves. These were the sort of circumstances that put the labour of the community at the service of one man, and conferred supernatural powers on him. Thus were created the social inequalities and the material factors that excited greed, envy, and jealousy. Out of such events emerged the social organization that regulated marriage and provoked quarrelling and malicious violence. By putting power into the hands of a ruler, this train of events made it possible for him not only to use the labour of the community for his own purposes, but also to exercise the power of life and death over his subjects.

Civilization brought every luxury and manifold diversions and comforts to mankind, but it also created hardship and injustice, and has been responsible for an infinity of suffering. If the invention of a metallic currency added a powerful instrument for the promotion of trade and industry, it also created a weapon that facilitated greed and unrest. It is not with-

out interest that gold, the standard of currency, originally acquired its value as a magical substance, a giver of life. In fact, most of the arts and crafts and customs and beliefs are, so to speak, the by-products of certain devices to which the earliest kings resorted about sixty centuries ago, in the full and earnest hope of averting from themselves the risk of death and extinction. They were prompted to adopt such measures by their instinct of self-preservation; and certain arbitrary circumstances determined the form their attempts took when they first began to appreciate the fact that death was the inevitable fate of all. But the fundamental principle that lies behind every human motive (excepting the disturbing influence of sex) is the preservation of life and youthful vigour. In fact, in delving into the distant history of mankind one cannot fail to be impressed by the persistence with which men have always been searching for an elixir of life to restore youth, to avert the risk of death and to give long life, and even an added span of existence to the dead (whose life at first was not consciously regarded as ended). The



---

elixir they sought was something that would bring "good luck" in all the events of life or the continuation of it they assumed beyond the grave. Most of the amulets, even of modern times—the lucky trinkets, the averters of "the evil eye," the love philtres, the practices and devices for securing good luck in love and sport, for curing bodily ills or mental distress, for attaining material prosperity or a continuance of existence after death—are survivals of this ancient and persistent striving after those objects which our forefathers collectively called "givers of life." If these ideas fettered men's freedom with the bonds of superstition, magic, and witchcraft, it must not be forgotten that they also led to the development of the essential arts and crafts of civilization, and of the beliefs expressed in religions and mythology. Moreover, they inspired most of the themes of ancient literature and gave birth to all the sciences.

The development of this train of beliefs had two results that affect the problem of cruelty and violence. Men came to believe that blood was the substance of life, and that youth could

be restored and the risk of death averted by offerings of human blood. In the second place, it was believed that the earliest kings, who controlled the waters of irrigation and the destinies of their subjects, were themselves, for the reasons I have already suggested, the source of the community's welfare and prosperity. Out of these ideas human sacrifice and habits of violence developed once a class-system was adopted. The king was killed when he showed signs of failing strength so as to safeguard the welfare of the state by substituting for him a younger and more virile source of prosperity and vitality. This was the earliest type of human sacrifice; but it soon gave place to a modified form, in which a man or woman was slain in place of the king, the theological explanation being devised that the blood of the slaughtered victim—or victims, for there was added potency in numbers—would rejuvenate the senile ruler.

The institution of human sacrifice or head-hunting, which was the expression of this early religious dogma, has been the chief cause of warfare and other forms of violence among

the peoples of lower culture throughout the ages.

The careful analysis of all the evidence that is now available goes far to corroborate the opinion that until the invention of the methods of agriculture and irrigation on the large scale was practised in Ancient Egypt and Babylonia the world really enjoyed some such Golden Age of Peace as Hesiod described. But it must not be assumed that because primitive man, being free from the exasperations created by the conditions of civilized life, enjoyed a happy and peaceful life, it is possible for civilized man, by renouncing his civilization and giving what he has to the poor, to regain his lost paradise. We have an eloquent object-lesson before our eyes at the present moment that the attempt to impose Communism on a civilized State may lead to the worst type of tyranny and cruelty.

In studying ethnological problems it is impossible to shut one's eyes to the social and political implications. But one can learn from the disastrous errors of the Eighteenth Century, when a wave of idealism found prac-

tical expression in the horrors of the French Revolution, the need for wide vision and sound judgment in applying the lessons of such studies of human behaviour. As there is a tendency among some ethnologists to confuse the communism of primitive man with modern political anarchism, it becomes necessary to protest against the danger involved in too hasty applications of ethnological theory. The complex machinery of civilization, to the use of which we are all committed, however much we may disclaim its thralldom, needs for its smooth working a controlling power that is itself disciplined and not subject to the gusts of passion to which ignorance and superstition (and, in particular, the lack of the rational judgment of an enlightened individual) expose it. The history of mankind proves clearly enough that great movements of thought and enlightenment are inspired and controlled by individuals and not by the mob. Reason is an individual possession. Passion and superstition are the weapons of the crowd. If, then, we are to be guided by reason and justice, we must put our faith in the individuals

---

who have such wisdom and confer upon them the authority to exercise the discipline.

### SUMMARY

The evidence that is now accessible for study establishes the fact that man is by nature a kindly and considerate creature, with an instinctive tendency to monogamy and the formation of a happy family group bound together by mutual affection and consideration. This is the basis of all social organization. The old theories of primitive promiscuity and lack of all sexual restraint are now shown to be devoid of any foundation and to be the very reverse of truth. Like all other living creatures, mankind is endowed with an instinct of pugnacity that impels him to protect himself and resent injury or injustice; but under natural conditions this impulse is usually kept well under restraint. But adequate provocation may drive any people to habits of violence and cruelty, and in particular may so urge children who fail to receive the affection and

sympathetic consideration that is theirs in primitive societies, but are subjected to cruelty and the sort of injustice that rankles.

By assuring to mankind a reliable supply of food and a thousand and one comforts and refinements of the conditions of life, civilization justifies its existence. In spite of the events of ten years ago, an undoubted amelioration of the conditions of civilized life and elimination of its cruelties and hardships is in progress, even if we are still far from the Golden Age. But the realization of the innate goodness of man and the malleability of human character should eliminate the misuse of the term "human nature" as a symbol of quarrelsomeness, and give us hope for the possibility of a progressive bettering of human conditions.

Living as we must continue to do under the discipline of civilization, the evidence of history shows the futility of seeking for happiness by tearing down the structure of society. The evils of civilization are not necessary or inevitable ingredients of the system. They can be eliminated without destroying the social organization. But the hope of the future

---

seems to lie in strict justice and toleration, in truth and honesty, in the elimination of superstition, and increased reliance upon the guidance of reason and the sympathetic kindness that is the essential and distinctive attribute of human nature.

The great humanists of the eighteenth century who were expounding the essential goodness of human nature were also concerned in giving practical expression to the idea expressed in the slogan, "Liberty, equality, and fraternity." But the immediate effect of their efforts was to create a reign of cruelty and tyranny that was worse than the evils they rightly destroyed. Instead of peace, they prepared the way for the Napoleonic wars.

We are now passing through a phase in which hopes of peace and liberty are again being dangled before the eyes of mankind. But, fortunately for us, the dangers of tampering with the machinery of orderly government are also being forced upon our attention. If the experience of the past has any value in helping us to see clearly, it should be realized

that the complicated machinery of civilization must be preserved if we are to have peace and justice. The complex economic adjustments that are necessary to maintain the vast populations and to provide equal justice for all classes of an unavoidably heterogeneous society call not for a loosening of the reins of government, but a stricter and more rational administration to eliminate causes of discontent. If the study of mankind indicates that warfare is not unavoidable and cannot be attributed to "human nature," it also demonstrates that civilization is an artificial organization of society, the continuance of which demands the preservation of the artificial system of government which is an integral part of it. It is not by breaking down the machinery of civilized administration, but by strengthening it, that we may hope for a fuller opportunity for man's genial qualities to find a freer scope. I should be failing in the courage of my convictions if I neglected to give expression to the belief that the system of government under which it is our good fortune to live in the British Empire offers



---

the best opportunity for the fuller development of these principles of justice and sympathetic toleration that constitute the chief hope for the future amelioration of society. No one who has travelled about the world and studied the social conditions that obtain in populations of varying degrees of culture can fail to realize that our people, illogical and inconsistent though their actions may often be, have learned in larger measure than any others to practise a restraint and sympathetic intelligence in government that hold out the largest hope for the display of the genial qualities distinctive of real human nature. For these reasons I believe that British imperialism is the truest form of liberty. But fussy interferences with social and intellectual freedom that so often masquerade under the name of liberty (under the belief that men may be made good by repressive legislation) may develop into the worst form of tyranny, and provoke strife and unhappiness. True greatness can be attained under conditions of civilization only by eliminating the superstition and the weak subservience that destroy harmony and

contentment, and by giving men the strict justice tempered with mercy which is the truest liberty.

In his *Fable of the Bees*, Mandeville, in 1723, attempted to ridicule the views of Lord Shaftesbury ; but he knew not what he was saying when he wrote that his "ideas of the goodness and excellency of our nature were as romantic and chimerical as they are beautiful and amiable." For modern ethnological research has demonstrated the very goodness and excellency that Mandeville attempts to scoff at. He was equally unfortunate in pretending that "innocence of manners and worldly greatness" were "two contraries that can never be reconciled together." The conception I have striven to interpret in this lecture aims at proving that there is no necessary incompatibility in greatness and innocence. If mankind is good by nature, its character is also so malleable that it may be made great without destroying its goodness.

## APPENDIX

---

### BIOGRAPHICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES CONCERNING MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY

1832. Born in Virginia.
1850. *Free Schools in Virginia.*
1851. Enters Methodist Ministry.
1854. Enters Unitarian Ministry.
1858. Marries.
1863. Comes to England; Preaches at South Place Chapel.
1864. Appointed permanent Minister.
1869. Abandonment of prayer, followed by gradual abandonment of Theism.
1870. *The Earthward Pilgrimage.*
1874. *The Sacred Anthology.*
1877. *Idols and Ideals.*
1883. *Lessons for the Day* (2 vols.). (Revised edition, 1907.)
1884. Temporarily retires from South Place.
1892. Returns to South Place.  
*Life of Thomas Paine.*

1897. Death of Mrs. Conway.  
Final retirement from South Place.
1904. *Autobiography* (2 vols.).
1906. *My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East*.
1907. Dies in Paris.
1909. *Moncure D. Conway: Addresses and Reprints*. (A Memorial volume containing a complete Bibliography.)
- 1910-1927. Memorial Lecture annually (see list opposite title-page).



# DUE DATE

OCT 23 1975

OCT 24 1985 RETD

JUL 17 1987 RETD

8

UNIVERSITY OF B.C. LIBRARY



3 9424 01088 1859

.48 pp. (Cont.)

